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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1186  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 8009  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 9874  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN 9208  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 5866  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 1150  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE 6525  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 4284

UNCLAS BOGOTA 000413

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FOR WHA/AND

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [VE](#) [FR](#) [SP](#) [SZ](#) [VT](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: URIBE ANNOUNCES ENCIRCLEMENT PLAN FOR HOSTAGE  
RELEASE

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) President Uribe announced January 26 that he has ordered military and police to locate, and subsequently encircle, areas where the FARC holds hostages. GOC officials explained the move is aimed at putting "humanitarian pressure" on the FARC to release its hostages and is not a military rescue option. Critics say the cordon plan could lead to a military clash and endanger the hostages' lives. The French Government reiterated its opposition to a military rescue, while Catholic Church officials sought clarification of Uribe's comments. Uribe's remarks followed his European trip, where he authorized the French, Spanish, and Swiss governments to work with the Catholic Church to promote humanitarian exchange talks with the FARC. END SUMMARY

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URIBE ANNOUNCES CORDON PLAN  
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¶2. (U) At a January 26 press conference, President Uribe said he ordered the military and police to pinpoint and surround locations where the FARC is holding hostages. Once located, he would seek the participation of the international community to press the FARC to release of hostages. Uribe said he first issued the order in June 2007 after the FARC killed eleven former Valle de Cauca legislators it held hostage. Uribe's statement followed his European tour where he authorized France, Spain, and Switzerland to work with the Catholic Church to facilitate humanitarian talks FARC. The FARC responded by accusing the GOC of "doubletalk" and "disrespect for human life," emphasizing that a military rescue operation would only end in bloodshed.

¶3. (U) Minister of Defense Santos, currently in France, explained that GOC's intention is to support the Church plan and efforts by France, Spain, and Switzerland to achieve a humanitarian exchange. Meanwhile, if information on the location of hostages surfaces, the encirclement plan can be used to engage the international community in place of a military operation. Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria said the cordon option is designed to put "humanitarian pressure" on the FARC, not to achieve a military rescue. In additional efforts to debilitate the FARC, the GOC offered USD 2.5 million rewards for each FARC leader arrested and announced a most-wanted poster campaign to target FARC members.

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CONCERNS ABOUT HOSTAGE SAFETY  
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15. (U) The GOC's announcement sparked speculation about its commitment to a humanitarian accord and concern for the hostages' safety. Some hostage family members criticized the plan, saying it would endanger the hostages and reduce the possibility of a humanitarian accord. Former hostage Consuelo Gonzalez de Perdomo, released by the FARC on January 10, warned any attempt to surround or rescue hostages could put them in serious danger. Claudia Rugeles, wife of former governor and FARC hostage Alan Jara, released two paragraphs from her husband's letter in January to prove the unviability of the plan. Jara wrote that a "rescue has no hope of success. If they bomb us, we'll die from above, if they come near us, they'll kill us on the ground. Whether the bullets are 'good' or 'bad,' there is still only death."

16. (U) The French government reiterated its position that no operation take place that could possibly endanger the hostages. Monsignor Luis Augusto Castro, chairman of the Episcopal Conference, called for the GOC to explain its proposal further so the Church could evaluate its own facilitation efforts. Congressman James McGovern - who visited Colombia in mid January - also voiced concern on January 29 that using a cordon to force a humanitarian accord would be a "mistake."  
Brownfield